

Alfie - Living the Legion

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This year we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the death of the Servant of God Alfie Lambe. As Spiritual Director of Concilium, the governing body of the world wide Legion, I feel it to be a duty and privilege to offer some reflections on his life and his relevance to Legionaries throughout the whole Legion world because I am convinced that he belongs not only to Ireland the place of his birth nor to Latin America the place of his Envoyship but to the peoples of Africa and Asia and perhaps especially to Europe with the tragic loss of faith and therefore of a moral life of so many millions of its people. Hilda Firtel writes: 'He never thought solely of his own field of work or the South American Continent. His interest was as wide as the world, which meant that his apostolic zeal embraced the whole world.' Alfie, like all good legionaries, sought to transcend all that might divide people whether it is language, culture, colour, race, historical rivalries or religion. No one can be excluded from the love and concern of the genuine legionary because he seeks to see our Lord in everyone he meets with the eyes and heart of Mary.

Alfie has left very little documentation but what he did leave has very valuable insights about himself and the Legion. Let me just mention a few things that have struck me forcefully. He writes: 'I am really very weak but I know that Our Lady uses the weak to show her power. For some time past I have made it a practice of reciting the Legion Promise daily towards the end of Mass. Every line of it is full of consolation for weak people.' We all make the Legion Promise when we join the Legion but wouldn't it be wonderful if we frequently prayed this promise so that it becomes the very atmosphere we breathe in our interior life. It encapsulates all the basic doctrines on which Legion spirituality is based. It is the keeping of this Promise to the full that is the ultimate secret of the life and holiness of Alfie.

It has often been said that 'living the Legion' is one of the most common phrases in the letters of Alfie. He writes: 'I am more than ever convinced that living the Legion is living the life of Our Lady, and the more one gives oneself to the Legion the more one finds oneself in Mary.' I think that what Alfie meant by 'living the Legion' is living the Handbook. He sought to translate into his personal interior and external life the spirit and the letter of the Handbook. And he succeeded in doing this according to all the witnesses of his life. It is the living of the Handbook that has made him a Servant of God and God willing some day it will be a major factor in his Canonisation.

The most profound justification for promoting the Legion is because it can make saints. No other justification is really needed. Of course, an intrinsic part of the making of saints in the Legion is that it also includes making them authentic apostles. The Handbook is concerned with the universal call to holiness and the universal call to Mission and Evangelisation.

What stands out in the apostolate of Alfie is Extension Work and the use of the Master and Apprentice method in the formation of others in faith and apostleship. As a young man of eighteen, he learnt the art of extension work in the rural dioceses of Kilalla, Kerry, Waterford, Raphoe and Kilmore under the tutelage and encouragement of his close friend Séamus Grace. He also became a full time indoor Brother of the Morning Star Hostel for 'down and outs' in Dublin and which is surely one of the great schools for acquiring holiness. This Hostel has produced so many outstanding legionaries. This is no wonder because the only way to survive in it is to see and serve Jesus with the heart of Mary in the poor men who reside in it. I mention all this because I believe that whoever does Extension Work or finds his vocation in the Hostel would do well to take Alfie as one of their special patrons. He knows what it is all about.

God had prepared Alfie well for his work as an Envoy in Latin America. He responded magnificently. His influence there was widespread and deep and lasting. It would be easy to chronicle all his outward activity and neglect to focus on the inner core of motives and supernatural faith. He was a praetorian member of the Legion so his basic spiritual diet was daily Mass and Communion, the daily praying of some form of Office approved by the Church and the usual praying of all the Legion prayers especially the daily Rosary and the Magnificat and of course two hours of solid apostolic work per week and the weekly meeting of a praesidium as an essential part of being an active legionary.

Alfie died after a short but painful illness but once more he was well prepared by Our Lord and His Mother for his final homecoming to the Father. I was deeply struck by what he said to a close friend shortly before he died. He said 'do not pray too much for me because I will be able to help you much better from heaven.' All legionaries will be much better legionaries in heaven and this is certainly true of the great legionaries. Alfie will spend his heaven doing good for the Legion. Let him help you by praying to him and sharing with him all the concerns of the Legion.